WHIRRAKEE

June 2001 Vol. 22 No. 5

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

65

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552

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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34. These rates include GST.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. Meetings start at 7:30pm and conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearers listed above, together with the following members: Darren Green; Maurie Lewis; Kate Lottkowitz; Phil Robertson; Bob Ruddick

Excursions The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Full-day excursions normally commence at 10am (usually on a Sunday); half-day excursions normally commence at 2pm and may be either on a Saturday or Sunday. Full-day or half-day excursions are usually held on the weekend following the General Meeting. Campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active sub-group:

Mammal Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Front Cover: Photographer: Ian Flecknoe-Brown

This Thick-tailed (or Barking) Gecko was found under flaking granite rocks (exfoliations) in the surroundings of Lake Cairn Curran. Its scientific name, *Underwoodisaurus milii* honours two people, see Darren Green's article on page 5 (P.Milius was a french naval commander). The fat, carrot-shaped tail has originally five rings of pale spots which fade with age. Regenerated tails often have distorted patterns or lack spots altogether. These geckoes ambush and hunt spiders, scorpions and crawling insects by day and night within or near their refuge (side chambers of animal burrows, overhangs, crevices and exfoliations). They occur widely through southern Australia over an area of about 1 mio square kilometres, from the East coast right through to the west coast of Australia....and for a lot more interesting information about this animal, see page 5.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 22, No. 5, June 2001
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Map Reading	Tony Morris	3
The Box-Ironbark Rally Camp	Kerrie Norris	3
The Geckoes of the Bendigo District: Parts 4 and 5.	Darren Green	5
More news from Don Franklin (via Inglewood)	Don Franklin	7
Swift Parrot Sighting	Kerrie Norris	7
From the Mailbag	Elaine Mathison	8
Birds from Bendigo to Lake Mungo and Back	Alf Howe	9
Introducing....Permaculture Bendigo		9
May General Meeting: John Neill 'The World's most Successful and Smallest Crustaceans	Sabine Wilkens	10
The Wellsford Forest	Stuart Fraser & Shelley Cohn	11
Big Brown Snakes – The Cynic Speaks	Raymond Hoser	13

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editors' Note
The Club subscribes to a number of monthly journals/magazines, for example 'Habitat' and 'Nature Australia'. Many times, nobody but Elaine reads these (see 'from the Mailbag) and they are piling up in the Club's library un-appreciated and un-read by the rest of the membership. At the last general meeting in May, our librarian Diana Collier gave us all a reminder that the books and journals are there for borrowing and if that is not utilised then they might as well not be there. A vote was taken as to whether we should continue to subscribe to journals like 'Habitat' and the members present clearly felt that the subscription should be discontinued. There was a short discussion about where the money should go instead, but no agreement was reached on the night and this was referred back to the Committee. If you feel strongly about the subscription to the naturalist-type magazines and/or whether the money should be given to some other conservation-minded organisation, please let the committee know.
On a positive note, it is good to see the Bird Group back in action with a promising range of activities for the next few months. See Diary page for details.

Map Reading

Author: Tony Morris

Part of one's enjoyment of the bush is having the confidence to be able to go anywhere in it – not just along along the major named tracks but to able to walk into a patch of scrub, cover several kilometres and then to find your way back to your car or your camp site.

If you are not experienced in map reading, I suggest that your first purchase should be the sheet "Bendigo 7724" from the DNRE shop in View Street and one of the cheaper models of the 'Silva' brand of compasses. (Attach a loop of light nylon cord such as bricklayers' line to the compass so that you can wear it around your neck or on your belt.). Read the instructions which come with the compass and store them in one of the pockets of your backpack.

The above Bendigo map sheet is 1:100 000 scale (1 cm on the map is equivalent to 1 km on the ground and is a good map to start with as it will be familiar territory.

On the edges of the map sheets there is much useful information. One section which is headed "How to quote a grid reference for a Particular Point" on Ausmaps and "Before Giving a Grid Reference....of this Map" on Royal Australian Survey Corps maps is particularly useful. It explains the system of "eastings" and "northings" for designating a point on a map sheet. The explanation is marvellously succinct.

You will not really appreciate how useful the grid reference system is to define a location or designate a route until you have tried to give another person, who has nomap, instructions on how to reach your campsite.

Consider the following route;
"Ausmap", Kerang 7626
650205. Head west 9km. crossing Loddon River.
567207. Head north 1km. ("Appin")
Head 2km WNW to park boundary at 547220.
Head WNW 2km to 523227 (W boundary of park)
Head NNE 2km to campsites at 531243 (Lake Meering)

Now try describing this route without reference to any grid points. Your description will be very much longer and certainly less precise. As fuel is expensive and your aim is to reach your destination, accuracy, a lack of ambiguity and brevity make sense.

My wife and I camped for one night recently in this excellent but largely overlooked Leaghur State Park on a trip back from Wyperfeld State Park north of Yaapeet.

(the map mentioned in the text is on the next page)

The Box - Ironbark Rally Camp

October 6 and 7
Paddy's Ranges Maryborough

VNPA is organising a special camping weekend, to demonstrate people's support for National Parks for our historically compromised woodlands. Birds Australia, Field Naturalists, Conservation and Bushwalking Clubs are all encouraged to participate.
Saturday afternoon is when "critical mass" would be appreciated to press the issue with media and politicians. For those not intending to camp, a car pool or even bus could be organised. An indication of numbers is necessary for sound planing. Give it some thought, organise family and friends for the cause, and let me know as soon as possible.
Kerrie ph. 54478017

Great Spectacle Lake
The Ranch
Langville
Round Lake
Little Lake Meering
Tobacco Lake
Lake Meering
Lake Meering
Normanville
quarry
APPIN STATE FOREST
LODDON
Macorna
BM 79
Two Mile Swamp
RAILWAY
Mile
Gunnado
Tragowel
Canajong
Numerous tanks
Gwandallan
Meering West
LEAGHUR
Appin
Bareena
BM 82
Ngalla
Ivanhoe
FOREST
Appin South
RIVER
Sylvan Vale
Avondale
PARK
KERANG ROAD
landing ground
Leaghur
Wandella Creek
Sheepwash Creek
LODDON
Mile Creek
Pennyroyal Creek
Bannagher Creek
Twelve Mile
Nine Mile
LODDON VALLEY HIGHWAY
Lake Leaghur
Canary Island
Loddon Gums
BM 15
Barnham
Channel
RAPORT 2 km
BOORT 15 km
DURHAM OX 15 km
50'

The Geckoes of the Bendigo District
Part 4: Thick-tailed Gecko, *Underwoodisaurus milii*

Author: Darren Green

This attractive gecko seems to be familiar in the minds of many naturalists, who often describe them as a purplish gecko with a fat tail. When asked if they have spots, they cannot say. In my mind, the spots along with their "sinister grin" make them an attractive, almost cute in some respects, member of the gecko family. Once again we see that while people may have seen these creatures, they have not taken the time to fully notice them, or record their distribution.

The name of the genus, *Underwoodisaurus*, suggests that they may be found "under wood," but no, the genus was named after the British zoologist, G. Underwood (Ehmann 1992). In fact I have never seen one under wood, bark, fallen timber, or loose bark at the base of stumps, although they apparently do occur in such places (Cogger 2000).

I came across one under a piece of discarded carpet at Faugh-a-Ballaugh Reserve, however, usually I find them under rocks. At Mt. Kooyoora they are typically found under a flat rock which may be on top of a large boulder in an open area. But they have also been found under a rock which is on soil.

The Thick-tailed Gecko is dark purplish black to reddish brown in colour with numerous small white or yellow spots arranged in rows across the back and tail. The original tail is a broad carrot shape but animals are often found with regenerated tails, which are usually a pale orange in colour. The underside is typically white in colour. The toes are thin and adapted to terrestrial life. Adults may reach a snout to vent length of 80mm, with tails adding another 30 to 40mm to their total length (description adapted from Wilson & Knowles 1988, & Cogger 2000). Communal egg laying has been observed (Wilson & Knowles 1988), otherwise the female will lay two parchment-shelled eggs after a spring mating.

The Thick-tailed Gecko is reasonably common and is found throughout the southern part of Bendigo district in a wide variety of habitats. They have been recorded from the granite areas of Mt. Kooyoora and Mt. Alexander, to the Box-Ironbark forests of Faugh-a-Ballaugh Reserve and Big Hill.

More often than not, when these geckos are found under rocks they are quite small, perhaps yearlings or sub-adults, that have not yet secured a "better" position. Being nocturnal, adults are frequently seen at night with the aid of a spotlight or torch with a strong beam. Occasionally the light may pick up a faint eye shine, however the noise of them scurrying across leaf litter usually alerts the searchers to their presence, and they may then be found with the aid of the spotlight. It is suspected that adults live amongst the cracks, crevices and caves of large boulders where they are difficult to observe. I have seen them in caves (eg. Nullarbor Plain), where conditions were much cooler during the heat of the day. Several individuals may shelter beneath the one rock.

When threatened, the Thick-tailed Gecko will raise its body high on its legs, perhaps in an attempt to look much larger than what it really is. It may make several lunges, while simultaneously "barking" at the assailant. The lunge is not normally an attempt to bite, although they will if given the opportunity, but combined with the bark, is a bluff or deterrent. They will scurry away given the opportunity. This behaviour may at times be humorous to watch, and as a result these geckos seem to be teased more than any other lizard.

REFERENCES

COGGER, H.G. (2000) Reptiles & Amphibians of Australia, 6th edition, New Holland Publishers, Australia.
EHMANN, H. (1992) Encyclopedia of Australian Animals: Reptiles, Angus & Robertson, Australia.
WILSON, S.K., & KNOWLES, D.G. (1988) Australia's Reptiles; A Photographic Reference to the Terrestrial Reptiles of Australia, Collins Publishers, Australia.

The Geckoes of the Bendigo District
Part 5: The Future of Bendigo's Geckos

Author: Darren Green

The future of the geckos of the Bendigo district is hard to forecast and there are a few contentious issues at stake. Some perhaps conflicting with interests of others. Populations seem to be steady, despite what they have had to contend with. For example, mining, wood cutting, collecting rocks for landscaping, urbanisation, and land clearing in general has had devastating impact on local populations. A gecko is unlikely to scurry out of the way of an oncoming bulldozer. Winter, a popular time for removing firewood from the bush, is when geckos in the Bendigo district are brumating, and are susceptible to extremes in temperature.

The Thick-tailed Gecko has made its way into captivity and is now readily seen in the pet trade. It is visually appealing to many enthusiasts and tends to do well in captivity. Today they are being bred in small numbers, however until about ten years ago poaching from the wild was evident in areas such as Mt. Tarrongower, Mt. Alexander and Mt. Kooyoora. Evidence of poaching could be recognised by over-turned rocks in areas (some may say this was the result of insect collectors, never-the-less the animals were gone or moved to an adjacent area). Breeding geckos is a long term project. A female generally only lays an annual clutch of two eggs. How can captive breeding provide, or keep up with, this increasing demand? When one gecko may fetch up to $100 in the pet trade, well...need I say more!

The Marbled Gecko has also found its way into captivity but they do not have the appeal of other geckos that are available through the pet trade. They "dull" in colour, are capable of climbing glass and therefore more likely to escape if given a chance, and tending to hide rather than be seen. Hence they are only worth around $25 and only kept by dedicated enthusiasts.

Despite the fact that they are in captivity, and that at times they have been over collected from the wild, I really don't think that the pet trade has had devastating results on wild populations. Given the opportunity (which does not happen with land clearing), another gecko will replace the poached one. This of course is conjecture, but I still find animals turning up in previously poached (alleged) areas. Once captive specimens are well and truly established, captive breeding can only relieve pressure from poaching from the wild. Whatever ones thoughts are for keeping native animals, the fact of the matter is that a licensing system is in place and people are allowed to legally keep wildlife. By the way, most licensed keepers are doing the right thing, it is only a small minority that are not. Therefore captive breeding should be encouraged and information on their husbandry should be made widely available for others, in order for captive species to become self sufficient.

Native birds, mammals and reptiles may prey upon geckos, thus are part of the food chain and biological web of life. Introduced mammals, such as the cat and fox are un-natural predators which hunt and kill geckos. Keeping cats locked up at night for example, is a simple solution to reduce the un-natural mortality of geckos. In summary, so long as poaching is kept to a minimal level (or ideally not at all), land clearing considered wisely (or ideally not at all), and un-natural predation cease, I believe that our Bendigo gecko population will still be around for a bit longer. Why not take the time to have a look for yourself.

More News from Don Franklin
(via Inglewood)

Upon reading the article by Don Franklin recently, Margaret Watts wrote to Don telling him how much she enjoyed it. The extract below is part of Don's reply to Margaret and Fred. Both spent some time with Don in the Inglewood area before he took off for the Northern Territory. Thank you Margaret for sharing the letter. This way we can have a bit more news from Don Franklin and his exotic surroundings up north....

.....This morning I went bird watching along the Adelaide River and to Fogg Dam with a firend and some visitors from Germany and France. Our first target was to show the visitors a Mangrove Golden Whistler. I could hardly believe it when we found a pair within 10 minutes, hiding in a small vine thicket patch along with Yellow White-eyes, Red-headed Honeyeater, Rufous-banded Honeyeater, Rufous Fantail and Shining Flycatcher.

Then, out on the grassy flood plain of the Adelaide River, a large bird flying in the distance proved to be a Bustard. At another stop we had a fleeting glimpse of a swallow. I've never seen a swallow in the Top End. It was probably a Barn Swallow, but unfortunately it didn't hang around long enough for confirmation.

Then to Fogg Dam, where our target was the Little Kingfisher. We saw Pittas and other fascinating birds, then in the midday heat and feeling rather tired, we found our Kingfisher just as we were about to depart. A lovely gem, and so tiny.

Last Thursday was one of the perks of the bamboo project - a day on an air=boat exploring the Mary River wetlands. The area under freshwater at this time of the year is simply immense - several hundred square kilometres of flooded paperbark forest and flooded grassland and lily stands. Saw countless thousands of Magpie Geese and many other birds beside. Highlight for me was a flock of terns, many, if not all, being White-winged Black Terns, numbering in the thousands. Many of the terns were moulting into breeding plumage. Saw a few crocodiles too.

A few weeks ago I managed to get a week off to do some bird atlassing around the Renner Springs and Tennant Creek area, a thousand kilometres inland from Darwin. It may be semi-desert country, but it sure was wet this time. They've had the most amazing season. On the edge of the Tanami Desert, I reckon half the Mulga scrub was under water and the other half was so soft that when we tried to walk through it, we sank up to 30cm into the soil and soon gave up.

Plenty of birds. Highlight forme was the Spinifex Bird. We saw a number of tropical woodland species much further inland than they normally occur, notably Pheasant Coucal, Pictorella Mannikin (always a special bird to see) and Brown Quail. On the way home and back into the tropical woodland, we found a Northern Shrike tit, a bird so rarely seen as to be almost mythical, though this is the second time I've seen it now.

Another day in the field on Tuesday, looking for suitable bamboo study sites along the Mary River.

Thanks again for writing. I really did enjoy reading your letter. Hope you both keep in good health.

Regards
Don

Swift Parrot Sighting

by Kerrie Norris

It has been reported that Swift Parrots were sighted in Costerfield State Park on May 1. In the a.m., 6-8 birds were feeding on lerps in Grey Box, while 2 birds were seen in Ironbark during the afternoon – again feeding on lerps. Nil trees were in blossom in the area.

Spring in the Bendigo Bush

The first meeting of a small sub-committee has met in May. Contact Barbara Pelczynska or Jane Cleary (see inside front cover for telephone numbers) if you would like to contribute to the planning of this great event in the spring calendar of Bendigo.

From the Mailbag
Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

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NATURE AUSTRALIA(Aust.Museum)
Autumn 2001

"A Giant Among Possums" by Tom Heinson reports on the Bear Cuscus, an elusive creature of the equatorial rainforest of Sulawesi in Indonesia. This essentially Australian type of marsupial, along with the Dwarf Cuscus, has been little studied.

"Box Jellies" by Jamie Seymour & Paul Sutherland reveals the lifestyle of the box jellyfish, one of the deadliest creatures on earth. Their venom, plus an extremely effective venom-delivery system, allows them to catch and digest a range of prey.

"Centipedes: the Great Australian Bite" by Greg Edgecombe describes an ancient, diverse, and fascinating group of creatures. They are found in a wide range of habitats, from sea level to mountaintops.

"The Wopilkara's Return" by J.Richards, P.Copley & K.Morris reports on the survival of the Greater Stick-nest Rat on West & East Franklin Islands off the South Australian coast. Extinct on the mainland since the 1930s, captive-bred animals have been released on other islands, and recently at sites in two states.

"Helmet Heads" by F. Kroon & D.Westcott tells of encounters with the cassowary, one of Australia's largest birds. The Southern Cassowary, resident of Queensland rain forest, is one of only three existing species worldwide.

- Masks, high heels and spurs: Masked Lapwings
- Rare and Endangered: the Grey Nurse Shark
- Eastward Bound: Australian flora and fauna in New Zealand

HABITAT(ACF)
April 2001

- Repairing the Country: has the Penny Finally Dropped? Federal politicians recommend a national environment levy.
- Slick Operators Target Reef: "oil sharks are again circling the Great Barrier Reef in search of petroleum and profits"
- Australia Leads the World!... in Land Clearing Rates.

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Also received recently:

*Castlemaine Naturalist(CFNC)
May 2001

*Newsletter(Ballarat FNC)
May 2001

*Geelong Naturalist(GFNC)
May 2001

*Field Nats News(FNCV)
May 2001

*Tuan Talk(VNPA)
April 2001

*Business and Diversity(Earthwatch Institute)

*Australian Landcare(Nat.Heritage Trust)
March 2001

*Birds on Farms: Guidelines for Sustainability

*Envirobusiness Update(Dept of Environment & Heritage)

- Corporate volunteers
- Waste oil plans
- Newsprint recycling
- Regional activities

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Birds from Bendigo to Lake Mungo and Back – 23rd to 25th April
Author: Alf Howe

Beyond Balranald to Mungo (2 days)

Wedgetail Eagle (12)
Major Mitchell (20)
Blue Bonnet Parrots (flock, 6 or 7)

In the Belah country

Superb Blue Wrens (4)
Magpies
Australian Raven
Magpielarks (2)
Grey Butcher Birds (2)
Apostle Birds (several flocks)
Banded Plovers (4)
Brown Falcons (4)
White-rumped Miners (numerous)
Red-rumped Parrots
Yellow Rosella (flock)
Zebra Finches (several flocks)
Emus (several groups)
Black-faced Woodswallow (1)
Richards Pipit (2)

Between Balranald and Tooleybuk

Whistling Kites
Brown Falcons
Brown Goshawk (1)
Wood Ducks (on farm dam)
Black Ducks
White-faced Herons (2)
Little Black and White Cormorants (2)
White-necked Heron (1)

Kerang (Ibis Rookery, 15 minute stop)

Straw-necked Ibis (many)
Sacred Ibis (few)
Little grebes
Darter (1)
Little Black and White Cormorant
Black Ducks
Pink-eared Duck
Black Swans
White-faced Heron
Swamp Harriers
Whistling Kite (1)

Between Macoma Natural Channel and Loddon Vale

Brolgas (a pair flying north on the East side of the Highway)

It has been seven years since I have seen the Ibis Rookery. It had been badly damaged by European Carp. The regrowth of Lignum, reeds, Cumbungi and other water plants is good.

N.B. About thirty years ago travelling along Arumpo, Top Hut road west of Mungo I saw Black-faced Miners in the Mallee. I also saw them on Kinross Station about the same time.
I wonder of the big bush fire in the early eighties which razed most of the country from Wentworth to Ivanhoe dispersed them. That was the last time I saw them.

Introducing...
Permaculture Bendigo

Meets on the second Wednesday of teh month at 7:30pm in the Gravel Hill Gardens office building
65-71 Mundy Street Bendigo

Come along and share ideas and experiences.
Each month we will have a guest speaker
Cost $ 2.00 to cover tea, coffee, supper and energy used....

Fresh produce is also available at times. To enquire about this and other matters, please contact Evan Davies on 0419 472835.

Unfortunately the meetings coincide with the general meetings of the BFNC. This is what is planned for this year:

Wednesday 13th June
What is Permaculture?
Brian Hosking, Evan Davies and Tim Sansom will give us an idea of what permaculture is and about their experiences in running Bendigo's first community-based Permaculture Garden

Wednesday 11th July
Energy Efficient Housing
Peter Sansom will share with us the story behind his passive solar designed home (as seen in 'Owner Builder'), and also ways in which we can save energy.

Wednesday 8th August
Grafting Fruit Trees
Tim will look at different methods of grafting and budding. Bring along a grafting knife if you have one and some prunings from any tree you might like to swap with someone.

Wednesday 12th September
LETS System Bendigo
Cath Holton will introduce the concept of LETS and explain how it works. A good opportunity to ask any questions you may have about LETS.

Wednesday 10th October
Mandala Chookdome System
Alan Parry will show how this highly productive vegetable-growing system works, with instructions on how you can set one up at home.

Wednesday 14th November
Bush Foods
Ryan Young will show us some of the Bushfoods that can be grown in the local area, and also how we can use them.

May General Meeting
Speaker John Neill: The World's most Successful and Smallest Crustacean

Author: Sabine Wilkens

John Neil, who has a background in teaching english literature, spends much of his free post-retirement time in another world – as an Honorary Associate in the Electron Microscope Unit at LaTrobe University Bendigo. Here, for no reward but the sheer pleasure of it he deals with his subject matter, the world's most successful and smallest crustaceans.
Two superlatives in the title...but these big claims were soon explained. The crustaceans John deals with are not lobsters, crabs or prawns but ostracod(e)s and most are less than 1mm in length. The claim that they are the most successful spans over place and time. They have occurred continuously from the Paleozoic to the Recent, a period of 500 million years and they are found in aquatic to semi-aquatic habitats, from the depth of the ocean to jungle leaf litter, from the polar regions to the equator.

John who has always collected fossils of some size or another, has, since his move to Bendigo, been interested in fossil ostracods and in the classification of these tiny organisms. In fact, he started on the microfossils with foraminiferons, but when he found an odd one, and it turned out to be a rare and undescribed ostracod, he turned his attention to this group.

Most people have never seen an ostracod. They are typical crustaceans in that they have an external shell, in this case a carapace made up of two halves with the animal lying protected in between and gathering food, reproducing and moving along all with many pairs of appendages. The halves of the carapace are held together by muscles. For palaeontologists, the structure of the carapace, its toothed hinge line and the muscle scars on their insides are essential for the classification of fossil ostracods.

New species are erected on anatomical differences in these characteristics. For those who are familiar with the concept of a 'biological' species (those organisms which can interbreed under natural conditions and produce fertile offspring) this may be a radical way of deciding on different species. However, the palaeontologists has no choice but to apply this morphological species concept as fossil organisms generally do not reveal much about their reproductive behaviour, let alone if their offspring are fertile.

In Victoria, fossil ostracods can be found wherever there have been marine incursions. But if somebody is interested in collecting these, it would be impossible without prior research as to which area, which rock type etc. Marls, unconsolidated material with a high carbonate content are a good start. Due to their small size, it would be impossible to determine the presence of ostracods in the field, so the material needs to be collected purely on speculation and dis-aggregated and sieved down to 50μm before it can be determined if ostracods are there or not.

A binocular microscope is needed for the next step, the examination of the sieved material. For this you need a metal tray (this is non-static and your specimens will not fly off and a very very fine paint brush dipped in water.
When a specimen is spotted, it is picked up with the paint brush and mounted on a special slide with numbered squares and then coated with a water soluble gum.

Such slides are needed for comparisons, but what a task... 48 000 species of fossil ostracods are listed and if you find an odd one (like John did at the beginning of his ostracod career) you must be sure that it not one of the 48 000 existing species before it can be given a new species name. Luckily John had help for that one from a Victorian ostracod expert...

John gave some locations where fossil ostracods can be collected (e.g. in the Heathcote area, Costerfield, Torquay, Barwon Heads, cliff locations along the Murray River, coastline along south of Adelaide, around Gippsland Lakes and near the mouth of the Mitchell River, however success in finding these would still depend on expert guidance at these sites.

Living ostracods are a lot easier to collect, simply go to any beach, find the swash line and collect the sand material from there (in a film canister for example). Ostracods occur loose in this material, thus they do not need to be separated out, however they may b a bit worn.

Throughout the talk we were treated with fantastic images, mostly from the scanning electron microscope. These interesting organisms are very beautiful to look at, but so small that most people will never see them throughout their lives.
It makes you wonder what else is out there...

The Wellsford Forest

Authors: Stuart Fraser and Shelley Cohn

The Wellsford Forest is a large block of Box-Ironbark forest. It runs from Epsom to the Campaspe River on the northern side of the McIvor Highway to the east of Bendigo. It is approximately 20 km long by 6 km wide.

Biodiversity Conservation

The ECC Report acknowledges the Wellsford Forest's importance for biodiversity conservation for:

- Williamson's Wattle
- Ausfeld's Wattle
- Buloke
- Sand Rush
- Cane Spear Grass
- Swift Parrot
- Brush-tailed Phascogale
- One large old tree site

There is an anomalous patch of Green Mallee at the Fosterville end of the forest.

Apiarist Interest

Apiarists value the forest because of the summer/autumn flowering Ironbark (80% of all Ironbarks flower in the winter, 15% in summer/autumn and 5% in the spring). Summer-flowering ironbark areas are unique in Australia because the flowering time of all the Red Ironbark species in this area is eight months.

Yellow Gum is unique in the Wellsford in that they bloom from March until October (this is a very long time for nectar production). It is the main nectar source in this forest as Ironbarks do not always bloom. Grey Box blooms from March until winter. It is a very heavy nectar source. In some years all these three bloom together and 'you stand in awe'. There is a circle under each tree which is the nectar on the ground.

Cultural History

A Cobb & Co Coach Road runs through the forest. Blue-stone paving is evident.

History of the Wellsford Forest

Most of the Wellsford Forest was razed to the ground during the mining era of the late 19th century. The regrowth was cut for eucalyptus oil until the early 20th century when a decision was made to allow the forest to regenerate for wood

production. Remnants of the eucalyptus distillery machinery are still evident in the centre of the forest (to be confirmed).

Unfortunately during this phase of regrowth from eucalyptus oil production to forest production, a virulent form of Dodder LAurel became evident in the Ironbark areas. It was estimated by the Forestry Department at the time that none of the Wellsford Forest would regrow if this infestation continued.

A forester, Mr Curry, worked in the Wellsford Forest during the 20s, 30s and 40s. He dedicated his life to saving the forest. During the depression he organised teams of men on the 'susso' to physically remove the Dodder from these trees, thereby saving the trees and the forest. The Dodder moved to the understorey of the Ironbark areas. In many areas of the forest there aren't even Golden Wattles in the understorey. There was very little understorey left after the Dodder attack.

During the 40s and 50s the forest grew and matured. The foresters had won the battle to re-establish the trees.

In the 1960s, the Dodder appeared to vanish. Only small pockets still existed. Curry retird and a new forester, Mr Ryan, was appointed to manage the forest, Over a three-year period, the first cut of the forest was undertaken. They started at Sugarloaf and worked towards Epsom.

A new forester was appointed in 1973, Mr Halloran. They realised they had lost 90-95% of the regrowth from the 1960s cut to the Dodder Laurel. They stopped cutting and closed the forest. Halloran initiated research into the Dodder Laurel. Mr Peter Fagg did the research.

The next forester, Mr Jennings operated in the late 1970s. He continued the policy of Halloran and kept up the research. Mr Jennings, in his spare time, studied and photographed the wildflowers of the Wellsford. He published a book on the Wellsford wildflowers.

Mr Joe Morley arrived in 1982. Morley decided that the research showed that the forest could with a light, careful cut. He did an experimental cut in Ironbark areas, a normal cut. Within two or three years the Dodder Laurel had taken over again. The experiment had failed.

During the 1990s all the old, experienced foresters left the Department. The written history of the Wellsford Dodder Laurel disappeared. There appears to be no corporate memory of the Dodder Laurel problem. As the forest has not been cut for 20 years, the Dodder has died down. There is a belief, and a hope, by the foresters that the Dodder will not come back after this cut.

2001: John Cuddy, Chief Forester, is supervising the recommendations of the ECC for forestry areas, i.e. to convert them to sawlog production. The ECC has done the Wellsford a huge disservice with its recommendation for wood production. It will take two years (2001-2002) for the current foresters to complete a thinning operation to prepare the Wellsford for sawlog production, 50 coupes - 3600 ha. To prepare a sawlog area the foresters cut the coupes for firewood and posts, leaving only a few trees - they are spacing the trees out to encourage growth. Areas where the trees are larger a being logged for sawlogs now.

Current sawlog production is earmarked in four sections of the forest.
1. 2001/02: Coupe 05/151/004/0003
700 sawlogs from 283 ha (this appears to be recently completed)
2. 2002/03: Coupe 05/151/004/0001a
300 sawlogs from 113 ha.
3. 2002/03: Coupe 05/151/006/0002
700 sawlogs from 139 ha.
4. 2003/04: Coupe 05/151/006/0003
700 sawlogs from 190 ha.

In the history of the Wellsford Forest and its Dodder Laurel problem, what they have done in the sawlog coupe that has been completed is a severe overcut. On past experience it can be expected that over the next 30years, 90% of any regrowth will be destroyed by Dodder Laurel.

Why we are concerned
It appears that NRE is not managing the forest ecologically. This is evidenced by increasing threatened and extinct species (i.e. Regent Honeyeater is no longer in this area, it is restricted to north-eat Victoria).

Current policy for preparing the forest for sawlog production does not take into account the virulent form of Dodder Laurel which is unique to the Wellsford Forest.

Big Brown Snakes – The Cynic Speaks.

Author: Raymond Hoser

There was recently an article in the journal of the Victorian Association of Amateur Herpetologists (VAAH) (*Crocodilian*) by John Higgins, former editor of the *Maryborough Advertiser*.
In that issue (2 (7) 1999), he spoke about large Brown Snakes (*Pseudonaja textilis*) from his local area in Western Victoria.
I replied with my own comments on the matter in the same publication in February 2000 (2(8):9)
Due to the obvious proximity of Maryborough to Bendigo, I thought it'd be worth my while to repeat a few of my same comments here in *Whirrakee* for the benefit of this club.

In Higgins' article he mentioned 'formal records' of two specimens measuring 11.5 and 9.5 feet.
As I read his piece I just had to cringe as I read of the 'formal records' of two specimens.
Now at this stage I hate to call anyone a liar, but do ask, "please explain".
What exactly are these 'formal records'? and: Are these allegedly HUGE specimens lodged in a public museum so that skeptics like myself can see them?
My understanding is that the answer to the latter question is a resounding "no".
As for the first question, I'll leave that as a blank and add a third question: How accurate or reliable are these so-called 'formal records?'
Sounds to me a bit like the police claiming corruption doesn't exist!
That's the official line and we all know what to make of that!
And yes, it all sounds a bit like the 27 foot Scrub Python story or the 35 foot Retic.
At this stage there is no evidence that either exists – but yes, books still publish both statements as proven "fact" and/or 'formal records'.

While it would be reckless to discount any possibilities within the realms of zoology, I suggest that in the absence of concrete evidence to the contrary, all claims of 11.5 and 9.5 feet 'Brown Snakes' of the family Elapidae from anywhere in Victoria (including Bendigo) be discounted as mere flights of fantasy or fiction.
For that matter, I doubt that these alleged records could even be attributed to Carpet Pythons (*Morelia*) and know of none from this state ever getting anywhere near 11 feet!
However in fairness to Higgins, he does make one statement I agree with. That is that brown coloured elapids in Australasia are in desperate need of a major taxonomic review.
That one genus (*Pailsus*) and more than one species (so far only known from Australia and Islands to the north, including New Guinea, with one species described as recently as at end 2000, namely *P. rossignollii* from Irian Jaya) can be overlooked by science until the late 1990's is testament to the above assertion.
And yes, at the present time I am still looking further into the relationships and taxonomy of the various known and possibly unknown forms of the King Brown Snake (*Cannia* (AKA *Pseudechis*) *australis*), known from most parts of Australia (excluding Victoria, although it may occur in the far north-west).

However in the event of any record-breaking or unusual "Brown Snakes" being found in the Bendigo area, the local people are fortunate in that they have immediate access to some very talented herpetologists. Including Dale Gibbons and Darren Green (both of whom are members of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club) as well as several others.
And then again, if any record-breaking Brown Snakes are actually found in the area, I'd also suggest lodging the snakes with John Coventry, who is the reptile curator at the National Museum in Melbourne.
RAYMOND HOSER – DONCASTER, VICTORIA.
E-mail: adder@smuggled.com

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Speaker Syllabus for General Meetings 2001– Second Wednesday 8:00 pm

Please check each **WHIRRAKEE** for additional events or changes. If a workshop is planned, it will start at 7:00pm. The speaker will be introduced at 8:00 pm.

Date - 2001	Topic	Speaker
5 June cancelled	WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY - SPECIAL PUBLIC LECTURE **Please Note: This lecture has been cancelled**	
13 June	**Implementing a Landscape Approach to Conservation Management in the Goldfields Bioregion**	**Robert Price**, Manager, Flora and Fauna North West Region, DNRE (Bendigo)
11 July	**Pollen Flora of the Box-Ironbark Forest**	**Katherine Legge and Sabine Wilkens,** LaTrobe University (Bendigo)
8 August	**Managing a Saline Environment: the Success of the Loddon-Murray Community's Irrigation Salinity Management Plans**	**Steve Lottkowitz**, DNRE Bendigo
12 September	***Annual General Meeting***	
10 October	**Wildlife Shelters and Wildlife Rescue**	**Garry Cheers, Wildlife Rescue and Information Network Inc.**
14 November	**The Landscape Approach to Biodiversity**	**Geoff Park,** North Central Catchment Management Authority
12 December	**Christmas Dinner** At the Hall, Bring Salad, Casserole or Desert. Come early, to sit down at 6:30, and visit with friends for as long as you like.	

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals.
It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Mammal Survey Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meeting..... please note: new Format

Wednesday, June 20

7:00pm: This month's workshop is entitled "Identification of Local Robins" It will be conducted by Glenise Moors and sounds promising, and may be helpful to those trying their luck at bird spotting in the Whipstick later in the month (see below). Please bring your own bird book and a note book.
In addition to the workshop, tables with reading material are set up for those present early but not participating in the workshop.

8:00pm:

Mammal Study Group

Each Sunday in May and June all the nest boxes in Spring Gully Reservoir will be checked. Maurie Lewis is in charge of this activity. Be at the Spring Gully shop at 9:45am and finish by 1pm. Ring Maurie Lewis (0407427179) to confirm.

June 27, 7:30pm
There will be a meeting but the speaker is yet to be confirmed.

July 25, 7:30pm
Eric Wilkinson will discuss Hairy Nose Wombat biology and former distribution

Supper
The usual arrangements for supper are as follows: members either bring a plate or pay $1 for supper. This small amount is used to reimburse members who purchase essential supper supplies.

Bird Observer Group

Saturday, June 23
Keen birders Pam and John Land, who have a Trust for Nature property on the edge of the Whipstick, will share their local knowledge of where to find the birds of the season. At the time of writing the Yellow Gum is coming into flower and the variety and number of honeyeaters abound in the area.
Meet: 9am at Eaglehawk Town Hall
Bring: Binoculars, morning snack, gear for *rain, hail* or *shine*
Plus: Lunch, if you wish to continue adding to your tally in the afternoon
Contact: Pam and John, ph. 54361511 or Kerrie, ph 54478017

Saturday, July 14
Elvyne Hogan's property, Shelbourne East ph 54353344.
Meet: 2:30pm Lockwood Rd, off High Street,Kangaroo Flat (car pool).
3:00pm 'Casuarina Hill'Shelbourne East
Elvyne's Trust for Nature property 'Casuarina Hill' possesses remnant bushland of what is geographically the northern boundary of the granite belt. Since the reduction of rabbits due to calicivirus, the proliferation of indigenous flora now accommodates and increasing variety of bird species; for example Rufous Songlark, Painted Buttonquail, Diamond Firetail, White-browed Babbler and Hooded Robin.
Bring: Binoculars, sturdy footwear and weather-proof clothing. If you wish to saty and savour the evening views from 'Casuarina Hill', bring something to share and tempt the palate for dinner.

Saturday, August 1
Carney Reserve, Tang Tang Swamp and Tandarra area
Depart: 9am, BFNC Clubrooms
Bring: Binoculars, protective clothing and footwear, lunch, morning and afternoon tea.
Contact: Alf Howe 54483383
Long time resident of Prairie West, Alf Howe is keen to share his wealth of knowledge of the habitat and its birds with us. If Alf isn't able to conjure up some Grey Crown Babblers or even Brolga, we will surely see a good variety of bird species anyway.

October.....date to be announced
Spring Gully area.